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Radiation Increase Reported At U.S. Embassy in Moscow

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The State Department said yesterday the Soviets have sharply increased microwave bombardment of the U.S. embassy in Moscow the past two months.

Department spokesman John Trattner said there have been bursts of increased radiation, lasting less than one hour each, since Sept. 7.

He said the State Department has brought up the subject with Soviet officials, but has received no explanation.

Officially, the Soviets have denied they beam microwaves at the U.S. embassy. They maintain the source of the radiation, which provoked a health scare when it became public knowledge last year, is leakage from electronic communications and eavesdropping devices on the embassy's top floor. [Although neither nation will say so, it is generally assumed the purpose of the radiation is to counter U.S. eavesdropping.]

Trattner said the new, intensified radiation bursts reached the power of nine microwatts per square centimeter—one microwatt below the Soviet industrial safety standard and considerably below the U.S. safety standard.

After the United States protested last year, U.S. officials said, the radiation level dropped to about two microwatts per square centimeter.

U.S. officials speculate that the microwaves are part of a sophisticated Soviet eavesdropping system, which reflects sound waves back to a remote listener.

Trattner said there is no evidence the radiation has had any ill effects on embassy employees. A full-scale study by Johns Hopkins University Medical School will not be finished until June.

A study by the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy says one effect of such radiation is to stimulate growth of lymphocyte cells in blood cells of animals. Lymphocytes, a type of white blood cells, are part of the body's defense mechanism against infection.

The telecommunications office study said the effect of such radiation "remains to be determined," but theorized that even low levels could trigger hormonal changes.

Trattner said State Department studies continue to show "a mild deviation in the number of lymphocytes" of people studied in Moscow.

However, he said, some of the people who showed the increase had no contact with the embassy.

State Department medical officials say the cause may be something in the Moscow environment, perhaps in the water.